



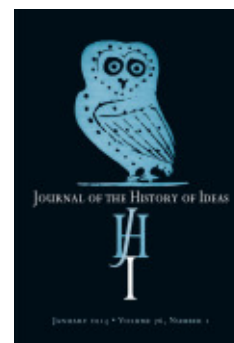
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*Leonardo Bruni, the Medici, and the Florentine Histories*¹

Gary Ianziti

Leonardo Bruni's relationship to the Medici regime raises some intriguing questions. Born in 1370, Bruni was Chancellor of Florence in 1434, when Cosimo de' Medici and his adherents returned from exile, banished their opponents, and seized control of government.² Bruni never made known his personal feelings about this sudden regime change. His memoirs and private correspondence are curiously silent on the issue.³ Yet it must have been a painful time for him. Among those banished by the Medici were many of his long-time friends and supporters: men like Palla di Nofri Strozzi, or Rinaldo degli Albizzi. Others, like the prominent humanist and anti-Medicen agitator Francesco Filelfo, would soon join the first wave of exiles.⁴

¹ This study was completed in late 2006/early 2007, prior to the appearance of volume three of the Hankins edition and translation of Bruni's *History of the Florentine People* (see footnote 19). References to books nine to twelve of the *History* are consequently based on the Santini edition, cited in footnote 52. Translations from these books are my own. For the convenience of post-2007 readers, however, I have now added parallel references (in parentheses) to the proofs of the forthcoming Hankins text and translation. I wish to thank Jim Hankins for his kindness in making these proofs available to me in so timely a fashion.

² Nicolai Rubinstein, *The Government of Florence under the Medici* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 1–16; Dale Kent, *The Rise of the Medici: Faction in Florence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 289–351.

³ Paolo Viti, *Leonardo Bruni e Firenze: Studi sulle lettere pubbliche e private* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1992), 114, 130, 315, 334.

⁴ Profiles in Kent, *The Rise of the Medici*, 179–85, and in Arthur Field, "Leonardo Bruni, Florentine Traitor? Bruni, the Medici, and an Aretine Conspiracy of 1437," *Renaissance Quarterly* 51 (1998): 1109–50.

Bruni was not only linked to such men by ties of patronage and friendship; he had also for many years acted as the chief ideologue of the pre-Medicean oligarchy.⁵ One might logically expect that he too would become a victim of Medici vengeance in 1434, or soon thereafter. Yet this did not happen. Instead, Bruni remained Chancellor until his death in 1444. Scholars are divided as to how to characterize these last ten years of Bruni's Chancellorship. Some have followed the lead of Hans Baron, portraying Bruni as slipping into a form of political quietism.⁶ According to Paolo Viti, for example, Bruni after 1434 toned down his earlier republicanism in order to comply with the new order.⁷ Other scholars have stressed that Bruni—despite the occasional flamboyance of his civic rhetoric—was always an advocate of restricted government.⁸ While the power struggle between the Medici and their adversaries was real enough, the system Cosimo and his associates introduced after 1434 differed from its predecessor only in the consistency with which it was applied. Bruni's personal adaptation to the new state of affairs thus required no major ideological adjustments, only a certain amount of accommodation.

Bruni, in fact, flourished under the Medici as never before. Besides continuing as Chancellor, he pursued a parallel career as a holder of office in the highest councils of state.⁹ This was unusual for someone who already held the Chancellorship; it would not have been possible without the strong support of the Medici party. The argument that such offices were largely ceremonial, and that Bruni was effectively being sidelined during the Medici years does not hold weight.¹⁰ On the contrary, the evidence suggests that Bruni was a major player and policy maker in the early years of Medici ascendancy. His personal ties with Cosimo and other members of the family were of long standing. Earlier he had dedicated to Cosimo his translation of the pseudo-Aristotelian *Economica* (1420), as well as his translation of

⁵ Riccardo Fubini, *Storiografia dell'umanesimo in Italia da Leonardo Bruni ad Annio da Viterbo* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2003), 131–64.

⁶ Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* (rev. ed.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 427–28.

⁷ Viti, *Leonardo Bruni e Firenze*, 40–42.

⁸ James Hankins, "Rhetoric, History, and Ideology: The Civic Panegyrics of Leonardo Bruni," in *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections*, ed. James Hankins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 143–78.

⁹ Raffaella Maria Zaccaria, "Il Bruni cancelliere e le istituzioni della repubblica," in *Leonardo Bruni cancelliere della repubblica di Firenze*, ed. Paolo Viti (Florence: Olschki, 1990), 109.

¹⁰ James Hankins, *Humanism and Platonism in the Italian Renaissance* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2003), 1: 41.

Plato's *Epistles* (1427).¹¹ When the Medici staged their coup in September 1434, Bruni may well have experienced a moment of hesitation. But it was not long before he began to show himself more than ready to serve their cause. His public letters in particular reveal him to have been a zealous advocate of Medici policy. They illustrate, for example, how effectively he lobbied to secure the transfer of the Council of Churches to Florence in 1439.¹² Bringing the Council to Florence was a key element in Cosimo de' Medici's plan to consolidate his grip on power.¹³

Bruni himself was a high-profile participant in the proceedings of the Council. Moreover by this time his literary works had begun to exhibit ideas that were consistent with Medici doctrine. One example is the treatise *On the Constitution of the Florentines*. Here Bruni described how in recent times access to office in Florence had come to be severely restricted. Modern scholars have seen this as a reference to Medici policy, based as it was on exercising tighter control over electoral procedures.¹⁴ In 1439 Bruni also published his *Commentaria rerum graecarum*, dedicated to the Medici partisan Angelo Acciaiuoli. The dedicatory letter makes clear that the purpose of the work was to warn against the reckless pursuit of war. This anti-war sentiment coincides in a striking way with Medici criticism of the previous, Albizzi-led regime.¹⁵

But by far the most important work published by Bruni in 1439 has yet to be mentioned. It is the work for which he is perhaps best remembered today, *The History of the Florentine People*. Bruni's *History* is of course not usually seen in its Medici affiliations. It is more often construed as a product of the oligarchical culture of the early fifteenth century. The process of composition and publication, however, stretched out over an extraordinarily long period. First begun in 1415, at about the time Bruni took up permanent residence in Florence, the *History* emerged in stages. A first in-

¹¹ Hankins, *Humanism and Platonism*, 1:124–25.

¹² Viti, *Leonardo Bruni e Firenze*, 137–96, 313, 335.

¹³ Riccardo Fubini, *Italia quattrocentesca* (Milan: Francoangeli, 1994), 62.

¹⁴ Baron, *Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, 428; Viti, *Leonardo Bruni e Firenze*, 40–42; Hankins, “Rhetoric, History, and Ideology,” 174–75. Text in Leonardo Bruni, *Opere letterarie e politiche*, ed. Paolo Viti (Turin: UTET, 1996), 171–87. English translation in *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni: Selected Texts*, trans. and intro. Gordon Griffiths, James Hankins, and David Thompson (Binghamton, New York: Renaissance Society of America, 1987), 171–74.

¹⁵ Hankins, *Humanism and Platonism*, 1: 261–62; Kent, *The Rise of the Medici*, 133–34, 256 ff.; Viti, *Leonardo Bruni e Firenze*, 95. Dedicatory letter in Leonardo Bruni, *Humanistisch-Philosophische Schriften*, ed. Hans Baron (Leipzig: Teubner, 1928), 146–47; *The Humanism*, 194–95.

stallment consisting of six books (I-VI) was published in May 1428.¹⁶ After May 1428, however, Bruni published no further portions of his *History* until February 1439. By this latter date, as we have seen, the Medici regime had been in place for over four years. During this period Bruni had re-adjusted his political loyalties in accordance with the new state of play. He had put his talents at the disposal of Cosimo, and become a prime mover in obtaining the transfer of the Council of Churches to Florence. Bruni in fact timed the publication of a new, augmented edition of the *History of the Florentine People* to take place in the midst of the celebrations connected with the opening of the Council. He made a formal presentation of the work to the *Signoria* on 6 February 1439. On the following day he received confirmation of the fiscal privileges he had enjoyed since 1416, together with their further extension to his male heirs. The specific reason for this extraordinary concession was cited in the diploma of conferral as being his composition of the *History*.¹⁷ The diploma cites the *History* as consisting of nine books, which shows that the formal presentation of 1439 included the first six books already published in 1428, plus the next three books. One can only presume that this new three-book installment was written between 1428 and 1439. It is not possible to be more precise, for we have at present no information concerning exactly when the individual books were composed. What we do know is that their publication took place at a crucial time, when Bruni was actively engaged as a public proponent of the Medici regime. It therefore seems reasonable to suppose that whereas the first six books of the *History* reflect the outlook of the early Quattrocento oligarchy, the next three books may well reflect a Medici perspective on past events.

Perhaps the differences should not be exaggerated. We have already suggested that there was more continuity than change in the transition from oligarchical to Medici rule. Whilst they may well have cultivated a populist image, the Medici came to control government through a complex system that both restricted access to office and kept their friends in power. The substantial continuity of their methods with those of the previous regime lends a certain unity to Bruni's *History*.¹⁸ We should not expect to find—in the books published under Medici auspices—a radical break with what had

¹⁶ Hankins, "Rhetoric, History, and Ideology," 159.

¹⁷ Zaccaria, "Il Bruni cancelliere e le istituzioni della repubblica," 112–14; Emilio Santini, "Leonardo Bruni Aretino e i suoi 'Historiarum florentini populi libri XII,'" *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa* 22 (1910): 139.

¹⁸ Nicolai Rubinstein, "Il Bruni a Firenze: Retorica e politica," in *Leonardo Bruni cancelliere*, 27–28.

gone before. What we can however discern, as I hope to show, are some subtle signs of a re-orientation. These can be seen above all in Bruni's treatment of the Medici family, and its role in the earlier history of Florence. It is worth noting in this context that the Medici hardly figure at all in Bruni's first six books. This is in spite of the fact that Bruni's main source for those books, the chronicle of Giovanni Villani, highlights Medici participation in a number of key events, including for example the overthrow of the tyranny of Walter of Brienne in 1343.¹⁹ Bruni's reticence on such occasions may or may not be deliberate. But what is significant is that starting with book seven Bruni begins to pay increasing attention to the Medici as historical actors on the Florentine scene. To be sure, this change reflects the higher profile of the family in the period treated (the second half of the fourteenth century), as well as the consequent proliferation of source material. Yet on closer inspection there is more to the story. It can be observed for example that in a number of instances Bruni deliberately modifies the record of events as handed down by the city chronicles. Comparison with the sources shows that Bruni's modifications correspond to a consistent pattern, the overall effect of which is to generate an account of the Florentine past more favorable to the Medici. My argument in what follows will be that the later books of the *History of the Florentine People* provide further proof of the close ties that came to link Bruni to the Medici regime. It may not indeed be inappropriate to characterize these books as constituting—among other things—a first attempt at a Medici history of Florence.

BRUNI'S ACCOUNT OF THE INVASION OF TUSCANY (1351)

The first indication of a Medici orientation in Bruni's *History* is detectable only in relation to the source, the chronicle of Matteo Villani. For this reason it has gone, as far as I am aware, unnoticed until now. The passage in question relates how, in 1351, a Visconti army invaded Tuscany and ravaged the countryside around Florence. This army, however, having exhausted the available food supplies, soon found itself in a perilous position. Facing starvation, its options were reduced to two: beating a hasty and

¹⁹ Giovanni Villani, *Nuova cronica*, ed. Giuseppe Porta (Parma: Ugo Guanda, 1990–91), 3: 314 (XIII, 8), 327 (XIII, 16), 331–339 (XIII, 17), 353 (XIII, 21). Cfr.: Leonardo Bruni, *History of the Florentine People*, ed. and trans. James Hankins (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001–7), 2: 263–81 (VI, 110–28).

ignominious retreat back over the mountains into Visconti-controlled territory, or slipping through the narrow Valdimarina pass into the Mugello, where abundant foodstuffs lay ripe for plunder.²⁰ Matteo Villani here indulges in some characteristic polemic against the Florentine government of the time: those in charge failed to see that salvation lay in closing down the enemy's escape route into the Mugello. It was only thanks to the initiative of a German captain in the Florentine service that a force was sent out to guard the pass. That force consisted of fifty knights and two hundred infantry. It was placed under the command of an unnamed member of the Medici family. Villani makes the point that the force of two hundred and fifty, although small, was adequate to the task. It was the cowardice of the commander in charge, that is, the unnamed Medici that led to disaster.²¹ Instead of taking the situation in hand, occupying the key defensive positions along the narrow pass, rallying the local population, etc., this member of the Medici family fled on the flimsiest of excuses, as a result of which the enemy passed with ease into the Mugello and wreaked further havoc.

Bruni's treatment of these same events is instructive. While he bases his account on Villani, Bruni is careful to eliminate the polemical dimension of his predecessor. He in effect reduces Villani's extended coverage of the Valdimarina incident to a single sentence: "With no one to block his way," he writes, the enemy "passed into the Mugello."²² Bruni, in other words, chooses not to dwell on why there was no one to block the enemy's access route into the Mugello. By condensing his account in this way, Bruni sidesteps what was a highly embarrassing subject: the cowardly behavior of a Medici family member. The suppression is certainly deliberate. It removes from the official record of city history an incident that was damaging to the Medici name.

Bruni also uses his account of Visconti military operations in Tuscany in 1351 to glorify the Medici. Again the source is Matteo Villani. Villani relates how the enemy, having penetrated into the Mugello, laid siege to Scarperia. The Florentines, desperate to fend off the attack, were called upon to send reinforcements. At this point, Villani relates two separate acts of heroism. First, how "a valiant officer of the Florentine House of Visdomini, with great courage chose thirty capable soldiers, good fighters all, and one night entered the enemy camp, taking those on guard duty completely

²⁰ Matteo Villani, *Cronica, con la continuazione di Filippo Villani*, ed. Giuseppe Porta (Parma: Ugo Guanda, 1995), 1: 209–14 (II, 10–12).

²¹ Matteo Villani, *Cronica*, 1: 212–13 (II, 11).

²² Bruni, *History*, 2: 338–39 (VII, 61).

unawares, and skillfully entered Scarperia with his men.”²³ The second act of heroism involves “an officer and citizen of Florence, greatly admired among the soldiers,”²⁴ but who remains anonymous. Villani relates the heroics of this anonymous captain and his men in greater detail: they too succeed in entering the besieged town.

Bruni too narrates both of these incidents, but with significant modifications. In the first incident, Bruni identifies the hero as “Giovanni Visdomini, a Florentine noble of high birth and experienced in war.”²⁵ In relating the second, more extended episode, Bruni lifts the veil of anonymity and reveals the hero to be none other than “Giovanni de’ Medici, a man thereafter famous.”²⁶ Bruni’s changes to the incident as related by Villani are not limited to the addition of the Medici name. Bruni considerably embellishes the entire episode. He turns it into an emblem of the sacrifice of one’s personal well being for the higher good of one’s country. Thus Giovanni de’ Medici volunteered for this dangerous mission out of a sense that it was his duty as a citizen. “He believed it would be dishonorable for himself,” Bruni writes, “to wander about, safe and free, not rendering due service to his country in its time of need, when some of his fellow-citizens were trapped and in danger.”²⁷ Bruni’s account of the rest of the incident shows a similar tendency towards exaggeration and embellishment. Clearly his purpose here was to portray the Medici as saviors of their country.

The relevance of such a portrait to the Medici position in the Florence of the late 1430s is clear enough. With discontent rife among the more influential families, and the exiled oligarchs finding support in the machinations of the Duke of Milan, Cosimo’s rule was still far from secure.²⁸ Some chroniclers report that during one crisis Cosimo was poised to flee the city and go into voluntary exile.²⁹ Only the unexpected military victory over Piccinino at Anghiari (June 1440) finally put the issue of the regime’s survival beyond doubt. The appearance of Bruni’s *History* in February of 1439 thus came at a critical time. Passages of the kind we have just examined refute in a striking way the anti-Medici propaganda that was being circu-

²³ Matteo Villani, *Cronica*, 1: 232–33 (II, 23).

²⁴ Matteo Villani, *Cronica*, 1: 233 (II, 23).

²⁵ Bruni, *History*, 2: 356–58 (VII, 82).

²⁶ Bruni, *History*, 2: 358–59 (VII, 83).

²⁷ Bruni, *History*, 2: 358–59 (VII, 83).

²⁸ C. C. Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), 151 ff, and more recently Field.

²⁹ E.g., Giovanni Cavalcanti, *Istorie fiorentine*, ed. Guido Di Pino (Milan: Aldo Martello, 1944), 373.

lated by the exiled oligarchs as part of their effort to oust Cosimo.³⁰ Such propaganda depicted the Medici as corrupt money-grubbers who were distinctly lacking in civic spirit. Bruni's *History* countered such charges by presenting earlier family members as paragons of civic virtue.

A question remains, however, concerning Bruni's sources. Is it really possible that the story of Giovanni de' Medici's heroics in 1351 is pure invention? Or did Bruni not have some justification for his changes to Matteo Villani's account? Bruni, after all, is noted today as a critical historian.³¹ Is it likely that he would concoct such a tall tale *ex nihilo*? Might he not perhaps have discovered some new information that provided a basis for his revision of this incident? Bruni knew that Scarperia was the center of the Medici country estates. He must have guessed that some involvement of the family in the defense of the town in 1351 was highly likely. He did not have to look far afield for confirmation of this hypothesis. According to the chronicler Stefani, for example, in 1351 "Giovanni di Conte de' Medici was captain of the province of the Mugello."³² And Bruni's research did not stop with his recourse to new narrative sources. As Chancellor, he enjoyed full access to the Archives of the Florentine Republic. He accordingly scoured the files relating to the year 1351. There he found conclusive proof of Medici heroism in a document of 20 October that is still preserved in the Florentine State Archives.³³ Bruni used this document as the basis for his final summation on the successful Florentine defense of Scarperia. The Florentine People, he writes, "decreed that Giovanni and Salvestro de' Medici should be decorated with the insignia of knighthood in token of their exceptional valor, and each man was given five hundred florins by public decree."³⁴ Bruni's use of this new material is impressive. It shows him en-

³⁰ The best examples of such propaganda prior to 1440 are the writings of Francesco Filelfo, especially the *Satires* and the *Oratio in Cosmum Medicem* (1437). An indispensable guide to these writings has recently appeared: Francesco Filelfo, *Satyrae (I-V)*, ed. Silvia Fiaschi (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2005).

³¹ Such is the view of James Hankins: see the preface to Bruni, *History*, 3: xviii, where Hankins presents Bruni as "the first historian in the Western tradition to compose a history based extensively on sources in government archives." The notes to the Hankins edition (3: 412–31) provide a striking illustration of this point. The matter may nevertheless require further clarification in relation to medieval practices: see now David S. Bachrach, "The Rhetoric of Historical Writing: Documentary Sources in Histories of Worms, c. 1300," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 68 (2007): 187–206.

³² Marchionne di Coppo Stefani, *Cronaca fiorentina*, ed. Niccolò Rodolico (Città di Castello: S. Lapi, 1903), 238 (rubric 650).

³³ Archivio di Stato, Firenze, Archivio della Repubblica, provvisioni 39, ff. 35–36. See also Santini, "Leonardo Bruni Aretino e i suoi 'Historiarum florentini populi libri XII,'" 73–74.

³⁴ Bruni, *History*, 2: 364–65 (VII, 91).

gaging in a widening of his research base well beyond the Villani chronicle. Yet the fact remains that neither Stefani nor the archival document offers any justification for the specific change under examination, i.e., Bruni's substitution of Giovanni de' Medici for Matteo Villani's anonymous hero. Modifications of this kind were due solely to the operation of the forces described earlier: they are signs of the historian catering to the needs of his patrons.

It will perhaps be objected that such interventions were relatively minor, so minor indeed that they may well have passed by virtually unnoticed at the time. But nothing could be further from the truth. Fifteenth-century humanists operated within a culture of nuance. A few choice words were enough to make or break a reputation, especially when enshrined in a lasting literary monument penned by a prominent intellectual. A few cases from a period slightly later than Bruni's will illustrate the point. In 1465, for example, the humanist Giannantonio Campano (1429–77) was disciplined for deviating ever so slightly from the version of recent events approved by his patrons. Campano had composed and delivered an oration on the first anniversary of the death of Pope Pius II. But his account therein of the Pope's deeds failed to please in every detail the self-appointed guardians of the Pope's reputation. A letter of Cardinal Jacopo Ammannati Piccolomini shows the care with which Campano's speech was dissected by the Piccolomini entourage.³⁵ Every last element of the speech was subjected to minute analysis, to make sure it conformed to what the Pope's former collaborators regarded as the official record of events. Nor was this a vain exercise in aesthetics. Those involved were men whose future careers depended to some degree on the diffusion of a favorable image of their defunct erstwhile protector.³⁶

Other examples abound. An ambassadorial dispatch of 19 February 1482 shows that the Marquis of Mantua, Federico Gonzaga, was highly upset by a brief passage in the recently published *Commentarii* of Giovanni Simonetta, former secretary to the Dukes of Milan.³⁷ The passage in ques-

³⁵ Iacopo Ammannati Piccolomini, *Lettere (1444–1479)*, ed. Paolo Cherubini (Rome: Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, 1997), 2: 835–39.

³⁶ Amedeo De Vincentiis, *Battaglie di memoria: Gruppi, intellettuali, testi e la discontinuità del potere papale alla metà del quattrocento* (Rome: Roma nel Rinascimento, 2002). See also Alfred A. Strnad, "Francesco Todeschini-Piccolomini: Politik und Mäzenatentum im Quattrocento," *Römische Historische Mitteilungen* 8 and 9 (1964/65 and 1965/66): 101–425.

³⁷ *Carteggio degli oratori mantovani alla corte sforzesca (1450–1500)*, vol. XII (1480–82), ed. Gianluca Battioni (Rome: Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, 2002), 298.

tion states that the father of the Marquis, Ludovico Gonzaga (d. 1478), and one of his military captains, “were forced by desperate circumstances into an ignominious flight” during the battle of Caravaggio, in September 1448. A single line from Simonetta’s voluminous work (“coacti sunt post desperatam salutem foedissimae fugae se committere”) provoked a diplomatic incident that had to be smoothed over by none other than the ruler of Milan himself.³⁸ Nor was this the end of the saga. Simonetta’s *Commentarii* also came under fire from the Piccolomini clan for allegedly casting aspersions on the actions of Pope Pius II. There followed a series of long and difficult negotiations with the author. One consequence of the Piccolomini offensive was the delayed publication of the *volgare* translation of the *Commentarii*. Publication was in effect held up for years while the contesting parties bickered over matters of content.³⁹

The point of recalling these incidents is to stress the importance of contemporary or near-contemporary history to the ruling elites. Image was all, and history writing was an image-making (or breaking) enterprise. The disputes listed above might well turn on only a few lines, tucked away within massive tomes of turgid Latin prose. The events referred to might have taken place decades earlier. No matter. Reputation hinged on the actions of one’s immediate ancestors as much as on those of oneself. The living and the dead were bound together in one continuum, whose fabric was woven by the narratives of historians. We must therefore suppose that Bruni’s modifications to the record of Florentine history—however insignificant they may appear to us—did not go unnoticed in the Medici circles of the late 1430s. The elevation of Bruni’s *History* to official status, the confirmation and extension of his privileges, and the parallel career he was able to pursue as a holder of high office from 1439 all suggest that his work was received with favor by the Medici. So too does the fact that Cosimo de’ Medici kept a copy of Bruni’s *History* among his most precious books.⁴⁰

The best testimony to the importance of Bruni’s revised account of Scarperia, however, has yet to be mentioned. It concerns the popularity of

³⁸ Giovanni Simonetta, *Rerum gestarum Francisci Sfortiae Mediolanensis ducis commentarii*, ed. Giovanni Soranzo (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1932–59), 240, line 6.

³⁹ *Dispacci e lettere di Giacomo Gherardi nunzio pontificio a Firenze e Milano*, ed. Enrico Caruso (Rome: Tipografia poliglotta vaticana, 1909), L–LVI, CLXXVI, 241–43, 266–68, 328–29, 335, 344–45, 352–53, 398.

⁴⁰ Dale Kent, *Cosimo de’ Medici and the Florentine Renaissance: The Patron’s Oeuvre* (New York: Yale University Press, 2000), 36. See also James Hankins, *Repertorium Brunianum: A Critical Guide to the Writings of Leonardo Bruni* (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo, 1997), 1: 41.

Bruni's amplifications among subsequent historians of Medici persuasion. The proposition that it was Giovanni de' Medici who had taken the decisive action in the heroic defense of Scarperia in 1351 soon became a commonplace of Medici historiography.⁴¹ Moreover, since Matteo Villani's text failed to comply with this by now official version, it too was duly modified. The sixteenth-century Medici-sponsored edition of Matteo Villani's chronicle thus suddenly began to attribute the salvation of Scarperia not to an anonymous hero (as in the original) but to Giovanni de' Medici.⁴² By the end of the sixteenth century Scipione Ammirato could cite both Matteo Villani and Bruni as the basis for his own considerably enhanced account, complete as it was with an extended and inspiring harangue of Giovanni to his band of men.⁴³ Having thus become entrenched in the chief narrative sources for the history of the period, the tale invented by Bruni remained influential well into modern times, and is still repeated in Medici lore to this day.⁴⁴

SALVESTRO DE' MEDICI AND THE CIOMPI REVOLUTION (1378)

Bruni's rewriting of the Scarperia material is by no means an isolated incident. Another example of his pro-Medici sympathies occurs in book eight of the *History*. Here we find Bruni once again in damage repair mode. Matteo Villani's account of the incursions of the Great Company—a band of marauders that terrorized Italy in the late 1350s—had cast aspersions on the behavior of certain Florentine officials, one of whom he identified as none other than Giovanni de' Medici.⁴⁵ Bruni accordingly set about trying to place the behavior of these officials in a more favorable light. Just to be

⁴¹ E.g., Poggio Bracciolini, *Historia florentina*, ed. Giovanni Battista Recanati (Venice: Giovanni Gabriele Hertz, 1715), 19.

⁴² Matteo Villani, *Historia*, in *Rerum italicarum scriptores*, ed. Ludovico Antonio Muratori (Milan: Società Palatina, 1729), 14: 116. Muratori's edition follows that of Filippo and Iacopo Giunti, dedicated to Grand Duke Francesco I de' Medici: *Istorie di Matteo Villani . . .* (Florence: Giunti, 1581). See Giuseppe Porta, "Censimento dei manoscritti delle cronache di Giovanni, Matteo e Filippo Villani," *Studi di filologia italiana* 37 (1979): 93–117.

⁴³ Scipione Ammirato, *Istorie fiorentine* (Florence: Amador Massi, 1647), 1: 531–32.

⁴⁴ See for example E. Grassellini and A. Fracassini, *Profili medicei: origine, sviluppo, decadenza della famiglia Medici attraverso i suoi componenti* (Florence: S.P. 44, 1982), 13–14 (Giovanni di Conte).

⁴⁵ Matteo Villani, 2: 219–36 (VIII, 72–79).

sure, he removed the name of Giovanni de' Medici altogether, thus severing any link between the Medici and the rather dubious happenings of 1358.⁴⁶

Such modifications suggest that Bruni set out to follow a consistent strategy throughout these last books of the *History*: on the one hand to exalt Medici heroics, real or invented, wherever the opportunity arose; on the other hand to suppress unsavory detail that might tell against the family's past. It is time now to consider how Bruni handled what was without doubt the most controversial chapter in the Medici family's recent history: its role in the Ciompi uprising of 1378.⁴⁷ Modern historians refer to this uprising as the Ciompi revolution.⁴⁸ The Ciompi were workers in the Florentine cloth industry. Traditionally excluded from any participation in government, these workers seized power in a series of urban riots in July 1378. They then proceeded to set up their own guilds and establish control over the highest magistracy in the city, the priorate. The radicalization of the movement, however, led to armed clashes in which the workers were defeated. Their guilds survived for a few more years, but were eventually dismantled. By 1382 political power in Florence was once again the exclusive province of the higher orders of society.

Needless to say, these higher orders—namely the post-Ciompi oligarchy that ruled down to the Medici takeover in 1434—took a dim view of the events of 1378 to 1382. Moreover, they tended to see Salvestro de' Medici, standard-bearer of justice in 1378, as the man principally responsible for what had occurred. Salvestro himself was exiled soon after the restoration in 1382, and his family barred from office.⁴⁹ The Medici of course made a spectacular recovery in the early fifteenth century, but they never quite completely shook off the opprobrium of having their name associated with the Ciompi period. In particular, their political enemies would not let them forget how their ancestor Salvestro had opened the gates to anarchy and bloodshed. It became axiomatic, when attacking the Medici, to men-

⁴⁶ Bruni, *History*, 2: 414–21 (VIII, 22–28).

⁴⁷ See Gene Brucker, *Florentine Politics and Society, 1343–1378* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 358–89, and Gene Brucker, *The Civic World of Early Renaissance Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 41–46.

⁴⁸ Classic accounts include Gene Brucker, "The Ciompi Revolution," in *Florentine Studies: Politics and Society in Renaissance Florence*, ed. Nicolai Rubinstein (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), and John Najemy, "Audiant omnes artes: Corporate Origins of the Ciompi Revolution," in *Il tumulto dei Ciompi: Un momento di storia fiorentina ed europea* (Florence: Olschki, 1981), 59–93.

⁴⁹ Elios Maffei, "L'esilio di Silvestro de' Medici," *Archivio storico italiano* 98 (1940): 82–84.

tion the crimes of Salvestro and the Ciompi; thus the official act of exile banning the Medici in 1433, cited as a primary reason the family's involvement in the events of 1378.⁵⁰ Such accusations continued to circulate well into the late 1430s and beyond. In 1437 for example, the chief ideologue of the exiled oligarchs, Francesco Filelfo, painted a lurid picture of Salvestro as a bloodthirsty madman who in 1378 had deliberately unleashed the mob and urged it to burn down the houses of the wealthy.⁵¹ Filelfo's tract, the *Oratio in Cosmum Medicem*, was part of a concerted campaign to discredit the Medici in the eyes of the international community, drive them out of Florence, and bring about the return to power of the oligarchs.

Bruni deals with the Ciompi revolution in book nine of the *History*, the last of the three new books to be published in February 1439. As numerous scholars have pointed out, Bruni's presentation of the events of 1378–82 is hardly sympathetic to the workers. Bruni had a natural horror of the multitude, and was strongly committed to the wisdom of governance by the few. He thus depicts the popular governments of the Ciompi period as aberrations. They ushered in a veritable reign of terror, complete with persecutions, proscriptions, and even mob killings of prominent, innocent citizens.⁵² Bruni's description of the horrors of the Ciompi period and its aftermath might well be meant as a sort of cautionary tale.⁵³ It illustrates in graphic detail what happens when those in power lose control to the mob. But there is more to this section of the *History* than the Ciompi and the question of popular government. There is also the question of ultimate responsibility. Bruni must explain how the mob was able to accede to power in 1378 in the first place. And here Bruni is surprisingly frank in sheeting home the blame not to the mob but to the elites. For according to Bruni's analysis, it was strife between competing factions within the elite that led to the troubles. More specifically, it was the decision on the part of the anti-

⁵⁰ Hankins, *Humanism and Platonism*, 1: 445. For the relevant sections of the document see Carlo Pellegrini, *Sulla repubblica fiorentina a tempo di Cosimo il Vecchio* (Pisa: Nistri, 1880), 86–88.

⁵¹ Filelfo, *Oratio in Cosmum Medicem*, Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, lat 18532, ff. 59r–62v. Fiaschi lists the five known manuscripts of this unpublished work in her introduction to Filelfo, *Satyrae*, XXII. See also Giacomo Ferrau, "Le 'Commentationes florentinae de exilio,'" in *Francesco Filelfo nel quinto centenario della morte* (Padua: Antenore, 1986), 370–72.

⁵² Leonardo Bruni, *Historiarum florentini populi libri XII*, ed. Emilio Santini (Città di Castello: S. Lapi, 1914–26), 223–27 (Bruni, *History*, 3: 3–23).

⁵³ John Najemy, "Civic Humanism and Florentine Politics," in *Renaissance Civic Humanism*, 85–86.

Guelf faction to appeal to the street that brought in its wake a people's revolt that soon spiraled out of control. According to Brunni, the man at the center of that decision was indeed none other than Salvestro de' Medici.⁵⁴

Brunni's indication of Salvestro de' Medici as the culprit may well seem puzzling in the light of what we have been arguing thus far. If one of the purposes of books seven to nine of the *History* was to ameliorate the image of the Medici in the city's past, then why cast blame of this sort on one of their ancestors? One scholar has argued that Salvestro belonged to a relatively minor branch of the Medici family, distant in any case from the line of Cosimo.⁵⁵ But as Anna Maria Cabrini has rightly noted, Brunni actually goes out of his way to describe Salvestro not as an individual, but as the member of an "illustrious, prosperous, and wealthy family" ("vir ex familia nobili, ampla et locuplete"). Cabrini also notes how Brunni focuses attention on Salvestro as the key decision-maker, in contrast to the source—in this case Stefani—where the decision to go to the people is presented as being of a more collegial kind.⁵⁶ Brunni, in other words, actually highlights Salvestro's role, and calls special attention to his membership in the Medici family. It would appear then that Brunni deliberately placed Salvestro de' Medici at the origins of what he regarded as a major political disaster. He made no attempt to deny Salvestro's responsibility, possibly because in this case the historical evidence was so heavily stacked against revisionism.⁵⁷ Brunni thus found himself forced to draw upon other resources. One of these was a deeper level of analysis. He makes a clear distinction for example between intentions and practical outcomes. Salvestro's intentions, he argues, were not evil but of the best possible kind: his aim was to curb the abuses being perpetrated at the time by the Guelf aristocracy. In particular, Brunni presents Salvestro as trying to mitigate the effects of the notorious *lex monitoria*, legislation designed by the Guelf Party stalwarts to restrict access to office beyond the constitutional limits. Brunni appreciates the high principle underlying Salvestro's policy, but deplores nevertheless its practical outcomes. The policy led to a hardening of arch-Guelf attitudes, to a polarization of forces in the city, and to the ensuing chaos of the period 1378–81.

In one sense then, Brunni singles out Salvestro de' Medici, in another he

⁵⁴ Brunni, *Historiarum* . . . , 223, lines 22–29 (Brunni, *History*, 3: 4–5).

⁵⁵ Ernesto Sestan, "Echi e giudizi sul tumulto dei Ciompi nella cronistica e nella storiografia," in *Il tumulto dei Ciompi*, 128–29.

⁵⁶ Anna Maria Cabrini, "Le 'Historiae' del Brunni: risultati e ipotesi di una ricerca sulle fonti," in *Leonardo Brunni cancelliere*, 302.

⁵⁷ See, e.g., the contemporary chronicles collected in *Il tumulto dei Ciompi: cronache e memorie*, ed. Gino Scaramella (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1917–34).

exculpates him. The incident seems to hinge for Bruni on the divorce between justice and effective policy. Salvestro de' Medici was guilty of an error in judgment, nothing more. By calling attention to the error, and to its political ramifications, Bruni indicates the gap that separates current Medici family policy from that of its fourteenth-century predecessors. The key passage deserves to be quoted in full. After describing the disorders caused by the Ciompi uprising, Bruni offers the following observation:

These events can serve as a perpetual reminder to political leaders not to allow the multitude to get involved in an armed uprising. For the masses can no longer be restrained once they begin to break free of their chains and realize that their superior numbers are a source of considerable strength. One must be especially alert to the early signs of dissension among leading citizens, for such discord leads to general disruption. Everyone agrees that the *lex monitoria* was hateful and pernicious. But in trying to amend the law, Salvestro de' Medici—a man from an illustrious, prosperous, and wealthy family—actually brought greater evils down upon the state. Quite unintentionally, he made the poor, the workers, and the lowest sorts of men rulers of the city. Thus while trying to aid a few citizens who had been unjustly barred from office, he procured the ruin of his own family and social class, and delivered them both into the hands of a raging mob. . . .⁵⁸

The unusually direct character of this advice—later condensed into a single sentence by Machiavelli⁵⁹—suggests its relevance to the Medici situation of the late 1430s. But what exactly was the message Bruni wished to convey? It is tempting to see here an allusion to the Medici reputation for over-reliance on popular support. In this case Bruni, the former oligarch, might be seen as issuing a warning on the dangers of demagogy. Yet such a reading would probably be an over-simplification. Historians have convincingly shown that the Medici were in reality no less oligarchical in orientation than their predecessors. The image of the Medici as the party of the people was largely a myth propagated by their enemies, and perhaps sometimes exploited for propaganda purposes by themselves.⁶⁰ So where then

⁵⁸ Bruni, *Historiarum* . . . , 224, lines 30–39 (Bruni, *History*, 3: 8–9).

⁵⁹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Istorie fiorentine*, ed. Franco Gaeta (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1962), 230 (III, 10): “Non sia alcuno che muova una alterazione in una città per credere poi o fermarla a sua posta o regolarla a suo modo.”

⁶⁰ Kent, *The Rise of the Medici*, 221.

does this leave Bruni's extraordinary passage on Salvestro de' Medici? In our view the passage is simply reinforcement of standing policy. It stresses, if anything, the rationality of the oligarchical politics born in the crucible of the post-Ciompi decades, and subsequently—beginning in the fifteenth century—embraced by the Medici themselves. The passage acknowledges the essential continuity of the Medici regime with the techniques of power exercised by the preceding oligarchy. It suggests once again how and why Bruni managed to make a smooth transition into the service of the post-1434 masters of Florence. Clearly he had no difficulty accommodating methods of governance that were basically contiguous with those that had gone before. From a more strictly public relations point of view, the passage indicates the extent to which the Medici of the late 1430s were eager to distance themselves from the dubious political legacy of their most illustrious fourteenth-century forebear. This process of disassociation was underway in other areas as well and was one of the keys to the family's fifteenth-century success.⁶¹

Book nine of the *History* also contains an account of the first serious attempt to challenge the power of the post-Ciompi oligarchy. The incident in question occurred in May 1387. Its origins are somewhat obscure.⁶² At the center of the controversy was Benedetto Alberti, leader of one of Florence's most influential families. As so often, the issue at stake concerned access to public office. Benedetto Alberti championed broad participation in government, a position that clashed with the exclusionist policies of the oligarchy. The crisis led to armed confrontation. Bloodshed was avoided, but Benedetto Alberti was exiled and the family banned from office for a period of five years. As told by Bruni these events form a kind of postscript to the troubles of 1378–81. Bruni depicts Benedetto Alberti as one of those implicated in the worst abuses of the Ciompi period. It was primarily for this reason, writes Bruni, that the ambitions of Benedetto Alberti and his supporters aroused suspicion and mistrust among the leaders of the oligarchy.⁶³ The latter had no choice but to strike swiftly and decisively. Bruni thus shows no sympathy whatsoever towards Benedetto Alberti. The banishment of such a troublemaker, he remarks, brings quiet. It allows the oligarchs the chance to complete their task of stabilizing their still relatively new government.⁶⁴

⁶¹ John T. Paoletti, "Medici Funerary Monuments in the Duomo of Florence During the Fourteenth Century," *Renaissance Quarterly* 59 (2006): 1117–63.

⁶² Brucker, *The Civic World*, 77–79.

⁶³ Bruni, *Historiarum* . . . , 241, lines 20–39 (Bruni, *History*, 3: 78–81).

⁶⁴ Bruni, *Historiarum* . . . , 241, lines 38–39 (Bruni, *History*, 3: 80–81).

Once again then we see Bruni advocating vigorous measures calculated to assure that power remains in the hands of the few. His advocacy of this line extends even to the condemnation of Benedetto Alberti, ancestor of a family closely allied to the post-1434 Medici regime. But Bruni also introduces an important qualification. While he identifies Benedetto as a Florentine knight “*ex familia magna et opulenta*,” he also underlines that in taking a stance in favor of popular government Benedetto Alberti acted as an individual, rather than as a member of his family.⁶⁵ The distinction is significant in that it isolates the behavior of this ancestor from the Alberti family as a whole. By taking this tack, Bruni manages to express the political views dear to himself and to his patrons, while also preserving the reputations of the powerful Medici backers of the late 1430s.

BRUNI'S LAST BOOKS

It is desirable at this point to consider the final three books of Bruni's *History*, that is, books ten to twelve. These books were not published and thus most probably not yet written—in 1439. The circumstances surrounding their composition are yet to be clarified.⁶⁶ These last three books are briefer, and for the most part sketchier than the previous nine. They also have a somewhat different character, being largely monographic. Their chief theme is the series of wars Florence fought with Gian Galeazzo Visconti of Milan in the period 1390–1402. Books ten to twelve are as a consequence quite reticent regarding the internal politics of Florence. Yet they do provide some further clues as to Bruni's treatment of the Medici and their associates.

It is important to observe that the 1390s were a problematic period for the Medici family.⁶⁷ Throughout the entire decade they remained on the margins of the political scene. Their exclusion no doubt stemmed from their still being identified with the populist politics promoted by Salvestro de' Medici during the period of turbulence 1378–81. Along with the Alberti, but to a lesser degree given their lower profile, the Medici came to be branded as *personae non gratae*. Their response was to participate in a series of

⁶⁵ Bruni, *Historiarum* . . . , 241, lines 21–23 (Bruni, *History*, 3: 78–79).

⁶⁶ For the most recent hypotheses see James Hankins, “Notes on the Composition and Textual Tradition of Leonardo Bruni's *Historiarum Florentini populi libri XII*,” in *Classica et Beneventana: Essays Presented to Virginia Brown on the Occasion of her Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Frank T. Coulson (Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming).

⁶⁷ Gene Brucker, “The Medici in the Fourteenth Century,” *Speculum* 32 (1957): 22.

ill-fated and increasingly desperate attempts to overthrow the power of the oligarchy, by violent means if necessary. A first instance occurred in 1393.⁶⁸ It involved an alleged plot to bring about the return of the exiled Alberti as heads of a new popular government. Among those implicated were several members of the Medici family.⁶⁹ Yet in relating these events in book eleven of his *History*, Bruni is careful to avoid any reference to Medici involvement. His account of the incident is of the most succinct kind, encompassing only a few lines.⁷⁰ Indeed throughout his coverage of the 1390s, Bruni generally refuses to portray the Medici as in any way implicated in repeated attempts to de-stabilize the rule of the oligarchy. His reticence is apparent for example in his account of the Donato Acciaiuoli episode of January 1396. Acciaiuoli was the instigator of a plan to unseat the oligarchs, reinstate the Alberti, and revive the flagging fortunes of popular government. The idea enjoyed widespread support. Among the participants were several members of the Medici family. When discovered, the whole affair led to the exile of Acciaiuoli and his supporters, including three leading Medici.⁷¹ Yet in this instance too Bruni deliberately avoids mentioning the Medici. He alludes only vaguely to “certain others” involved in the plot.⁷² These people too, he writes, were exiled as punishment for their participation, but Bruni is careful not to name names.⁷³ His silence reflects a dogged determination to remove from the historical record any traces of the Medici as fierce opponents of the oligarchy throughout the 1390s.

Of considerable interest too is Bruni’s brief postscript to the Acciaiuoli affair. According to Bruni, the incident illustrates two points.⁷⁴ The first relates to the fact that Acciaiuoli’s personal power in the city was far too great. This led to widespread envy (*invidia*). Bruni explains what he means by noting that Acciaiuoli had begun to behave as lord and ruler of Florence: “Ambassadors to the city frequently came to his private home; and anyone who had official business to transact went straight to him, as if he were the man in charge.”⁷⁵ The second point concerns Acciaiuoli’s habit of upbraiding his fellow citizens. Here too Bruni explains how Acciaiuoli, “as a man of integrity himself, found it difficult to put up with the vices of others, and

⁶⁸ Brucker, *The Civic World*, 90–92.

⁶⁹ Brucker, “The Medici,” 22.

⁷⁰ Bruni, *Historiarum* . . . , 264, line 50 to 265, line 5 (Bruni, *History*, 3: 184–85).

⁷¹ Brucker, *The Civic World*, 96–100.

⁷² Bruni, *Historiarum* . . . , 268, lines 21–22 (Bruni, *History*, 3: 200–201).

⁷³ Bruni, *Historiarum* . . . , 268, lines 37–38 (Bruni, *History*, 3: 202–3).

⁷⁴ Bruni, *Historiarum* . . . , 268, lines 39–41.

⁷⁵ Bruni, *Historiarum* . . . , 268, lines 41–43.

frequently reprimanded them.”⁷⁶ Such criticism did nothing to improve the republic, it only stirred up hatred (*malevolentia*) against the critic himself. Thus Bruni draws out the following lesson: “Citizens living in a free society are to be gently shown the right path to follow, not harassed with verbal abuse.”⁷⁷ Anna Maria Cabrini has noted that such comments bear a high degree of relevance to the post-1434 Medici rulers.⁷⁸ Indeed the accusations that Bruni lists as leveled against Donato Acciaiuoli in 1396 are very similar to those that would later be thrown up against the Medici and their partisans. The Medici too would be accused of behaving like lords of the city, of receiving ambassadors and transacting the city’s business within the confines of their private mansion.⁷⁹ Nor did the Medici escape becoming the objects of *invidia* and *malevolentia*.⁸⁰ Bruni’s reflections may well have been designed once again as a way of distancing both the Medici and their post-1434 partisans the Acciaiuoli from any association with such conduct. The remarks illustrate—by virtue of historical example—why prominent private citizens “living in a free society” must at all costs avoid behavior of this kind. Bruni seems to be saying that the Medici do not condone ostentatious displays of power and position, and he hints that the Acciaiuoli too have come to recognize the mistakes of the past.

Let us now return to the point made earlier regarding Bruni’s general reluctance to portray Medici involvement in periodic attempts (1393, 1396, 1397, 1400) to overthrow the Albizzi oligarchy. There is one exception. It concerns Bruni’s treatment of a plot to assassinate Maso degli Albizzi in the summer of 1397. Here Bruni does list among those implicated one Bastardino de’ Medici, a convicted murderer living in exile in Bologna.⁸¹ Bruni’s narrative, however, stresses the criminal nature of the plan, its improvised, amateurish character, and the total debacle in which it ended.⁸² Bruni pres-

⁷⁶ Bruni, *Historiarum* . . . , 268, lines 45–46.

⁷⁷ Bruni, *Historiarum* . . . , 268, lines 46–48.

⁷⁸ Cabrini, “Le ‘Historiae’ del Bruni: risultati e ipotesi di una ricerca sulle fonti,” 314.

⁷⁹ Enea Silvio Piccolomini (Pope Pius II), *I commentarii*, ed. Luigi Totaro (Milan: Adelphi, 1984), 1: 354 (II, 28).

⁸⁰ Giovanni Cavalcanti, *Nuova Opera*, ed. Antoine Monti (Paris: Université de la Sorbonne, 1989), 120–27 (chapters 33–36). Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Le vite*, ed. Aulo Greco (Florence: Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, 1970–1976), 2: 169.

⁸¹ On Antonio di Jacopo di Bartolomeo de’ Medici, called Bastardino, see Brucker, “The Medici,” 22, and Brucker, *The Civic World*, 100–101.

⁸² Bruni, *Historiarum* . . . , 273, lines 12–40 (Bruni, *History*, 3: 224–27). Bruni describes the assassination attempt as a “gravis et horrendus . . . casus.” Bastardino and his accomplices are “iuvenes audaces ac manu prompti.” Their designated victim, Maso degli Albizzi, is a “splendidus eques” and “magnus vir.”

ents Bastardino's involvement as an isolated incident, without deeper political motivations or consequences. In Bruni's narrative Bastardino is a misguided, hotheaded youth, and little more. We also know from the sources of another, more serious coup, engineered in 1400 by the Medici, Ricci, and Alberti families.⁸³ Bruni too relates the episode, but without mentioning Medici or Alberti involvement.⁸⁴ Again Bruni's silence is significant. The failed coup of 1400 resulted in a major and very nearly definitive setback for the Medici. The family found itself banned from office for a period of twenty years. Only a few members of the clan were later spared. Among these were Francesco and Giovanni di Bicci. The latter was the father of Cosimo and the architect of the family's extraordinary return to prominence in the early fifteenth century. It is perhaps not surprising that Bruni, having all but erased the traces of Medici opposition to the oligarchy, now turns, in the final pages of his *History*, to highlight the personal qualities and civic spirit of Giovanni di Bicci.

The opportunity comes with Bruni's account of Florentine efforts in 1401 to secure the services of Rupert of Bavaria in the ongoing war against Gian Galeazzo Visconti. The negotiations leading up to the final agreement are well known thanks to their being related in detail in the diaries of the Florentine envoy to Rupert, Bonaccorso Pitti.⁸⁵ They also figure in other accounts of the period, e.g. the anonymous chronicle, and the *Ricordi* of Giovanni di Pagolo Morelli.⁸⁶ These negotiations were for the most part conducted by the leading members of the oligarchy. Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici had only a small part to play: he was sent to Venice to make the first payment to Rupert's agents, once the agreement was reached. Pitti and Morelli both name Giovanni di Bicci in a matter of fact way; the anonymous chronicle simply notes that Rupert received the money owed him in Venice, without bothering to name the Florentine agent. Bruni, however, turns Giovanni di Bicci's service into an act of almost heroic proportions: "To pay out the money, since it was a huge sum, the Florentines sent Giovanni di Bicci, a man of prudence and integrity, and highly trusted in business circles. His duty was to oversee the payment in Venice, and he fulfilled

⁸³ Brucker, "The Medici," 22–26, and Brucker, *The Civic World*, 171–74.

⁸⁴ Bruni, *Historiarum* . . . , 280, line 40 to 281, line 2 (Bruni, *History*, 3: 258–61). Medici and Alberti involvement is detailed in several chronicles. See the *Cronica volgare di anonimo fiorentino*, ed. Elina Bellondi (Città di Castello: S. Lapi, 1915–18), 251–53, and also Giovanni di Pagolo Morelli, *Ricordi*, in *Mercanti scrittori*, ed. Vittore Branca (Milan: Rusconi, 1986), 249–50.

⁸⁵ Bonaccorso Pitti, *Ricordi*, in *Mercanti scrittori*, 416–29.

⁸⁶ *Cronica volgare di anonimo*, 264, and Morelli, 255–58.

the mission entrusted to him with the utmost reliability and scrupulousness.”⁸⁷

Everything in this passage is redolent of the high praise being heaped upon the effective founder of the Quattrocento Medici family fortunes. In a few lines Bruni has managed to invest Giovanni di Bicci with four key qualities: *prudencia*, *integritas*, *fides*, and *diligentia*. In contrast to the other sources, which mention the payment as a matter of routine business, Bruni stresses the delicate nature of the mission, implying it could be successfully carried out only by a trusted and skilled individual. Bruni thus makes a great deal out of almost nothing. His intention is no doubt to celebrate the man who single-handedly brought the Medici back from the political wilderness and established the foundations of their post-1434 pre-eminence on the Florentine scene.

CONCLUSION

As its title suggests, Bruni’s work is a *History of the Florentine People*, not a history of the Medici. Yet the foregoing investigation shows that the sections of the work either published or written after the Medici came to power in 1434 reflect the outlook of the new regime. Bruni removes from the record incidents that might prove embarrassing to the new rulers of Florence. He amplifies the heroics of family members, sometimes attributing to them deeds they never performed. When he comes to treat the later fourteenth century, Bruni works hard to eradicate traces of Medici involvement in populist politics. Where this is not possible—as in the case of Salvestro de’ Medici—Bruni develops an explanatory framework designed to categorize earlier mistakes. In the final book of the *History* he reorients the Medici family image to focus on the integrity of Cosimo’s father, Giovanni di Bicci. This change of emphasis appears to be part of a deliberate plan to disassociate the Medici from their troubled past and to portray them instead as responsible and reliable members of society. The purpose of such a portrait was to bolster Medici prestige. More specifically still its function was to combat the negative images of the family that were being circulated from the late 1430s by the exiled Florentine oligarchs and their supporters.

⁸⁷ Bruni, *Historiarum* . . . , 282, lines 17–19 (Bruni, *History*, 3: 266–67): “Ad persolvendas vero pecunias, quoniam immodica erat summa, missus est Iohannes Bicci, vir prudens et integer ac singularis apud mercatores fidei, qui solutionem Venetiis curaret. Is summa cum fide ac diligentia omnia peregit.”

Propaganda emanating from these quarters stigmatized the Medici as inveterate rabble-rousers, whose ancestors had long sown the seeds of discord and civil strife in Florence.

Bruni set out to counter such allegations. While it would be mistaken to see his work solely as Medici propaganda, or counter-propaganda, there is no denying the linkage between the themes identified above and the new masters of Florence. Contemporary readers of the *History* were in fact acutely aware of its apologetic dimensions. As early as 1442 the Medici-controlled Signoria made arrangements to secure the wider dissemination of the work through its translation into the *volgare*. This project was to bear fruit only several decades later under Cosimo's grandson Lorenzo the Magnificent.⁸⁸ Meanwhile, on the other side of the political ledger, we have the interesting testimony of Francesco Filelfo. The latter is famous among scholars today for his attempt—in book three of the *Commentationes florentinae de exilio* to present Bruni as a turncoat, whose true sympathies still lay with his old friends, the oligarchs.⁸⁹ The present study shows that this was nothing more than a piece of wishful thinking. Moreover Filelfo himself, in his more lucid moments, recognized that Bruni stood firmly in the Medici camp. It is in fact Filelfo who leaves us with the most telling assessment of the final stages of Bruni's literary activity. Bruni, he writes in the *Satyrae*, had become a propagandist, ready to falsify history in the service of the Medici cause.⁹⁰ While this may (characteristically) be too strong a statement, there is no doubt that the *History of the Florentine People* underwent a significant change in orientation after 1434. The last six books show that Bruni re-aligned his political allegiances to accord with the new climate. The result was that he cautiously and quietly became the first in a long line of Medici historians.

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⁸⁸ Fubini, *Storiografia dell'umanesimo*, 113–14.

⁸⁹ See in particular Field, who also lists the relevant bibliography. Ferràù, “Le ‘Commentationes florentinae de exilio,’ ” 372–73, thinks the third book was completed at the earliest in 1443. Bruni (d. 1444) probably did not see it.

⁹⁰ Francesco Filelfo *Satyrae* (Venice: per Bernardinum Vercellensem, 1502), 86 (VI, 10, 45–46). The passage (“somnia narrans/vana Leonardus, Medices quo reddat honestos”) appears to refer to Bruni's *History*. See the comments of Fiaschi in the introduction to her new edition of the first five decades: Filelfo, *Satyrae*, LIII.